

PLANNING BOARD & PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Fiscal Year 2009

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the land use, planning, and zoning activities of the Amherst Planning Board and Planning Department during Fiscal Year 2009. In FY 09, the Planning Department also provided principal staff support for the Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Historical Commission, Town/Commercial Relations Committee, and Disability Access Advisory Committee. Please also refer to the Annual Report for each of those Boards and Committees for more information on their activity.

CURRENT PLANNING

As in previous years, development issues, permit applications, Master Plan efforts, and Zoning Amendments occupied much of the time of the Board and Department during FY 09.

Table 1 provides a statistical review of the Department's activities, including the various permits it oversees, and zoning and other regulatory changes.

Table 1

Land Use & Zoning Activity

A.	<u>Review & Action</u>	<u># of Applications</u>
1.	Planning Board Special Permits	0
2.	Form A (Approval Not Required) Subdivisions	10
3.	Cluster Subdivision	0
4.	Standard Subdivision	0
5.	Subdivision Amendments	0
6.	Subdivision Lot Releases	4
7.	Subdivision/Site Plan Escrow Releases	0
8.	Street Name Changes	0
9.	Development Authorization Requests	0
10.	Site Plan Review Requests	6
11.	Sign Plans Approved	1
12.	Lighting Plans Approved	0
13.	Landscape Plans Approved	2
14.	Scenic Road Applications Reviewed	2
15.	Ch. 61 Removals Reviewed	0
16.	Ch. 61A Removals Reviewed	1
B.	<u>Review & Recommendation</u>	
1.	Zoning Amendments	10
2.	Rules & Regulations Amendments	1
3.	Special Permits/Variations	42
4.	Street Acceptances	0
5.	Street Discontinuances	0

Some of the more significant planning development proposals and issues of FY 09 included the following:

Commercial/Institutional

- Site Plan Review approval to amend SPR2001-0004 to allow for the construction of a storage shed at the Eric Carle Museum on Bay Road.
- Site Plan Review approval (withdrawn by applicant) to construct a 24,700 sq. ft. climate controlled facility on Meadow Street.
- Site Plan Review approval for New England Environmental, Inc. to construct two LEED-certified office buildings with associated storage buildings, parking and stormwater management systems, utilities and landscaping, on a parcel of land on Larkspur Drive.
- Site Plan Review approval for Amherst College to rebuild a portion of, construct an addition to, and renovate the existing historic Lord Jeffery Inn on Boltwood Avenue and Spring Street.
- Site Plan Review approval for the Emily Dickinson Museum to reconstruct a fence and several gate posts to restore the property edge as it appeared during Emily Dickinson's lifetime on Main Street.

Zoning Amendments

The Zoning Subcommittee and Planning Department staff worked on ten (10) Zoning Amendments during FY 09. Ultimately, seven (7) were reviewed by the Planning Board and brought to Town Meeting, six (6) were adopted by Town Meeting and one (1), Recreation Facilities, was referred back to the Planning Board for further review.

- **Duplexes in R-G & R-VC** – Article 7, to alter the permit requirement for two-family detached dwellings (duplexes) in the R-G and R-VC District from Special Permit to Site Plan Review approval, and to add a requirement for evaluation of the design of such duplexes, was adopted by Town Meeting on November 10, 2008.
- **B-G & B-VC Residential Density** – Article 8, to amend Sections 3.322, 3.323 & footnote b. of Table 3 to remove the Basic Minimum Lot Area and Additional Lot Area/Family sq. ft. requirements for townhouses, apartments, buildings containing dwelling units in combination with stores or other permitted commercial uses, and other permitted multi-unit residential uses in the B-G & B-VC Districts, and to clarify the permitting board or authority for such uses, was adopted by Town Meeting on November 10, 2008.
- **Professional Offices in LI** – Article 10, to amend Section 3.358.1 to change the regulation for technical or professional offices from N to SP in the Light Industrial District and to amend the Official Zoning Map to clarify the LI District boundaries for the following properties on Grove & High Streets: Assessor's Map 11D/Parcel 183, and Map 14B/Parcel 48, was adopted by Town Meeting on November 17, 2008.

- **Municipal Parking District Expansion** – Article 7, to amend the Official Zoning Map to increase the boundary of the Municipal Parking District to include the entirety of the Town center General Business (B-G) District and abutting Limited Business (B-L) districts north of Kellogg Avenue and Cowles Lane along with abutting properties in the General Residence (R-G) District, was adopted by Town Meeting on May 4, 2009.
- **Taxi Services** – Article 6, to amend Sections 3.340.3 and 5.013 to include taxi and limousine services, was adopted by Town Meeting on May 4, 2009.
- **B-G & B-VC Lot Frontage** – Article 8, to add clarifying language to footnote b. of Table 3, Dimensional Regulations, was adopted by Town Meeting on May 6, 2009.
- **Recreation Facilities** – Article 9, to amend Sections 3.315, 4.570, 10.397, 11.2404 & Article 12 to change the title of a recreation use category, clarify a usable open space requirement for provision of recreation facilities for selected residential uses, and add definitions for types of recreation and usable open space, was referred back to the Planning Board on November 10, 2008 and November 17, 2008.

MASTER/COMMUNITY PLANNING

Efforts continued on a number of long-range planning issues, while new issues and projects also involved the time and attention of the Planning Board and Planning Department.

Master Plan

During FY 09, Planning Board members and Planning Department staff continued to assist the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC), and its Master Plan Review Subcommittee, in refining the draft Master Plan document which is the result of the two-year *Planning Amherst Together* master planning process. In November 2008, the draft Master Plan was submitted to the Planning Board for its review prior to adoption. In December 2008, the Planning Board hosted a Master Plan public forum to discuss the history, process and receive public comments and questions. In early 2009, the Planning Board formed a Master Plan Subcommittee which met to review, edit and revise the draft plan. As of the end of FY 09, the Planning Board was nearing completion of its review, with the expectation that a final Master Plan would be adopted by the Planning Board during FY 10. A link to the final draft of the Master Plan is here:

<http://www.amherstma.gov/index.aspx?NID=954>

Kendrick Park Report

In May 2009, the Kendrick Park Committee and Planning Department staff submitted its Final Report to the Town Manager discussing the options for use, beautification and preservation of Kendrick Park. The report is based on fifteen months of monthly committee meetings, subcommittee meetings, four public meetings (neighborhood, school age, business and an All-Town meeting) and special events including a survey party for teen input at Bertucci's restaurant, field studies in other urban parks, detailed analyses of the tree inventory and site topography, and collaborative events with students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, which featured designs for Kendrick Park. A link to the Final Report to the Town Manager is here:

<http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=2492>

Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

In June 2009, Planning Department and Conservation Department staff completed a Five Year Update of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). This effort combined materials last prepared in 2003 with all-new data on existing protected land, as well as establishing and refining a series of goals and objectives for further land preservation and recreation projects. The updated OSRP was reviewed and approved by the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Select Board, and thereafter forwarded to the state for its approval. The approved OSRP will be used in conjunction with the Master Plan in considering Amherst's long-term planning projects. A link to the Open Space and Recreation Plan is here:

<http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=2256>.

Commonwealth Capital

In August 2008, Planning Department staff submitted the Commonwealth Capital application on behalf of the community – a task the Department has undertaken since the program's inception in 2005. For FY 09, Amherst tied for sixth in the Commonwealth - out of 130 communities applying, with a score of 105 points. The Commonwealth Capital program was established four years ago to promote more sustainable land use choices in Massachusetts cities and towns. The program examines thirty two (32) aspects of a municipality's implementation of sustainable zoning, planning, housing, environmental, energy, and transportation measures in place at the time of the application. The score will play an important role in the evaluation and distribution of more than \$600 million in state grants and low-interest loans.

Historic Preservation

The second half of FY 09 included part of the Town's 250th Anniversary. Planning Department provided staff support to the 250th Anniversary Committee with various anniversary projects. The Department also continued to assist the Historical Commission with its ongoing implementation of the 2005 Amherst Preservation Plan, including the development of proposals for CPA funding for historic preservation projects. The 2009 Annual Town Meeting appropriated a total of \$265,600 in CPA funds for historic preservation projects.

In FY 09, among numerous other projects, the Planning Department and Historical Commission were involved in overseeing the first phase of the restoration of 269 headstones in West Cemetery, Amherst's oldest burying ground. Completion of the project is anticipated in FY 10. The Department was involved in continuing negotiations with property owners to acquire for an historic landscape park two lots constituting the Main Street frontage of the historic Henry Hills mansion.

See also the Historical Commission's annual report. A link to the Amherst Preservation Plan is here: <http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=1125>. (Note: this is a large file)

Downtown

In FY 09, the Planning Department continued to pursue downtown revitalization projects involving such issues as parking, public open space, historical issues, and public infrastructure projects. Foremost of these was the approval of a plan for renovation of the c. 1920 Lord Jeffery Inn. Architect Anita Licis continued served as the Planning Board's representative to the Design Review Board.

The multi-year streetscape redesign and reconstruction of downtown sidewalks continued. The Planning Department assisted the Department of Public Works with development of designs for new sidewalk improvements on Amity Street and the west side of North Pleasant Street between Amity Street and the St. Brigid's parsonage driveway. The Department worked with the Tree Warden, Public Shade Tree Committee and others on downtown street tree issues and the development of designs for streetscape improvements in other areas.

See the DRB's annual report.

Housing

The Planning Department assisted the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee (HP/FHC), Amherst Housing Authority (AHA), and the Community Preservation Act Committee with analysis and development of projects to protect existing affordable housing and provide for the creation of new affordable units. Pre-development analysis, examination of alternative approaches, and discussions were held with developers and UMass regarding affordable housing developments at Olympia Drive, Pomeroy Village and elsewhere. Several discussions were held with private developers pursuing the potential for private student housing projects.

Planning staff and the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee continued to research and further develop amendments to the Zoning Bylaw to encourage affordability in new residential development. See Zoning Amendments.

Atkins Corner

During FY 09, the Planning Department met regularly with DPW and representatives of the residential associations in the Hampshire Village PURD to review design progress for the intersection and road system in this proposed new village center.

Office of Conservation and Development

In May 2009, the Planning Department staff helped complete a one (1) year process to relocate the Inspection Services Department into the same office as the Planning and Conservation Departments. The consolidation of these related departments into the Office of Conservation and Development included a complete renovation of the second floor office area to create a new administrative work areas, 15 work stations, conference room, and map storage room. The merging of these Departments absorbed a great deal of staff effort and included devotion of Planning Department staff towards further refinement, implementation and utilization of the MUNIS permit software program. The effort to create the Office of Conservation and Development will provide a coordinated and efficient place for citizens, business owners, and potential applicants to access information and meet with staff members.

In addition to welcoming the Inspection Services Department into the same office as Planning and Conservation, Planning Department staff continued to work on implementing a plan to relocate the Community Development Department from the Bangs Center to Town Hall. The Community Development Department staff includes Roy Rosenblatt, Director, and Ruth Taylor, Administrative Assistant.

Collectively, these efforts will result in a significant consolidation of departments and resources into a single Office of Conservation and Development, which now includes Planning, Conservation, Inspection Services and Community Development.

STAFF ASSISTANCE

Boards and Committees

Planning Department staff provided professional support and technical assistance to numerous Town boards and committees, local and regional boards, as well as Amherst citizens, community groups, other communities, and others. The Town boards and committees directly served by the Planning Department staff in FY 09 included:

- ❖ Planning Board (18 meetings);
- ❖ Zoning Subcommittee (16 meetings);
- ❖ Design Review Board (16 meetings);
- ❖ Master Plan Subcommittee (10 meetings);
- ❖ Zoning Board of Appeals (36 meetings);
- ❖ Historical Commission (19 meetings);
- ❖ Town/Commercial Relations Committee (5 meetings);
- ❖ Disabilities Access Advisory Committee (11 meetings);
- ❖ Comprehensive Planning Committee (5 meetings);
- ❖ Redevelopment Authority (3 meetings);
- ❖ Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee;
- ❖ 250th Anniversary Committee (Arts & Literature Subcommittee, History Subcommittee, etc.);
- ❖ UMass/Hadley/Amherst economic development dialogue; and
- ❖ UMass Campus planning effort.

Other committees or bodies for whom the Planning Department provided more occasional assistance in FY 09 include:

- ❖ Public Transportation Committee & Bicycle Subcommittee;
- ❖ Public Art Commission;
- ❖ Community Preservation Act Committee;
- ❖ Public Shade Tree Committee;
- ❖ Pioneer Valley Planning Commission;
- ❖ Valley Development Council (PVPC-sponsored body); and
- ❖ Amherst Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

During FY 09, the Planning Department staff continued to assist other Town departments, boards, and committees to develop project proposals, and to prepare and review related potential CDBG projects.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBERSHIP

During FY 09, three (3) Planning Board members – Aaron Hayden, Kathleen Anderson and Susan Pynchon resigned and two (2) members – Richard Howland and Eduardo Suarez were not

reappointed. Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham was reappointed and new Planning Board members Bruce Carson, Stephen Schreiber and David Webber were appointed.

One (1) new Planning Board member and three (3) Planning Department staff attended the 2009 Citizen Planner Training Collaborative conference in Worcester. Additionally, Planning Board members and Planning Department Staff received training from Town Counsel, Joel Bard, in February 2009.

At the end of FY 09, the Planning Board had seven (7) members: Jonathan Shefftz (Chair), Jonathan O'Keeffe (Vice Chair), Ludmilla Pavlova-Gillham (Clerk), Denise Barberet, Bruce Carson, Stephen Schreiber and David Webber, with two (2) vacancies.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT STAFF

Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director, completed his 24th year with the Department and continued to provide principal staff support to the Planning Board, Zoning Subcommittee and Historical Commission as well as overseeing all activities within the Planning Department.

Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner, completed her 6th year with the Department and continued to provide staff support to the Planning Board, principal staff support to the Design Review Board and worked on various other Planning Department activities including the Kendrick Park Report and updating the Design Review Board Handbook.

Sue Krzanowski, Administrative Assistant, completed her 21st year with the Department, offering administrative support to the Planning Board, Planning Department and helped with the addition of Inspection Services to the Office of Conservation and Development.

Jeffrey Bagg was hired in July 2008 as Senior Planner and provided principal staff support to the Zoning Board of Appeals and worked on various other Planning Department activities, including Commonwealth Capital and Zoning Bylaw revisions.

Nathaniel Malloy, former Planning Department Intern, was hired in September 2008 as Associate Planner and provided staff support to the DAAC, Historical Commission and worked on various other Planning Department activities, including the Open Space and Recreation Plan and grant writing.

Ryan Lundergan was hired as a Planning Department Intern from September 2008 to May 2009, and assisted the Planning Department in digitizing various Department records and preparing the publication of *Planning Briefs*, the Department quarterly newsletter. As FY 09 ended, budgetary constraints required the termination of the Planning Intern position, which had previously provided inexpensive, professional quality assistance to the Planning Department for over 23 years (since April of 1985).

Carolyn Holstein left the Planning Department in October 2009, after approximately six (6) years as the Assistant to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Jonathan Shefftz
Chair, Planning Board

Jonathan Tucker
Planning Director